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A City of Words: The Worcester Writers Project

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Project Number: IQP JD4-WW02
Project Advisor: Professor James Dempsey

A City of Words: The Worcester Writers Project

An Interactive Qualifying Project Report
submitted to the Faculty of the
Worcester Polytechnic Institute
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Science
by Julia Josefina Berg
on April 29, 2009

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AB Abstract

A City of Words is a web site about writers with associations to Worcester. It is based on the Worcester Area Writers web site, which was created some years ago by WPI faculty and students. This ongoing IQP emphasizes material by and about living writers on a renovated site, and creating more of a multi-media platform that includes video, audio, interviews with writers, and graphics. The future goal is to move into flash animation and other areas. Students are required to gather, edit and post these materials, as well as write biographies and critical analyses of the authors for which they are responsible. My role of was to design and program a new website as well as research and document local authors and conduct interviews with them.

1. Introduction

One of the main objectives of “A City of Words” project was to renovate the past website to be more interactive, have new and improved written content, and to incorporate more media such as movies and recordings. The website was originally designed and implemented by Michael LeBarron and Andrea Hubbard in 2002 and was redesigned and re-implemented by Tara Ellsworth, Kathleen Joyce, and Vickie Wu in 2003 (figure 1). As of April 21, 2009 the site was hosted at <http://www.wpi.edu/Academics/Library/Archives/WAuthors/> and featured 15 authors, 6 prose writers and 9 poets (figure 1). A backup copy of the site will be available on the City of Words server spaced mentioned in this report. Each author had an individual page that included a student-written biography, a list of selected works, related photos and several quotes. Over the course of August 2008- May 2009 we have added an additional 6 authors and rewrote 2 biographies to include newly discovered information through interviewing the writers.

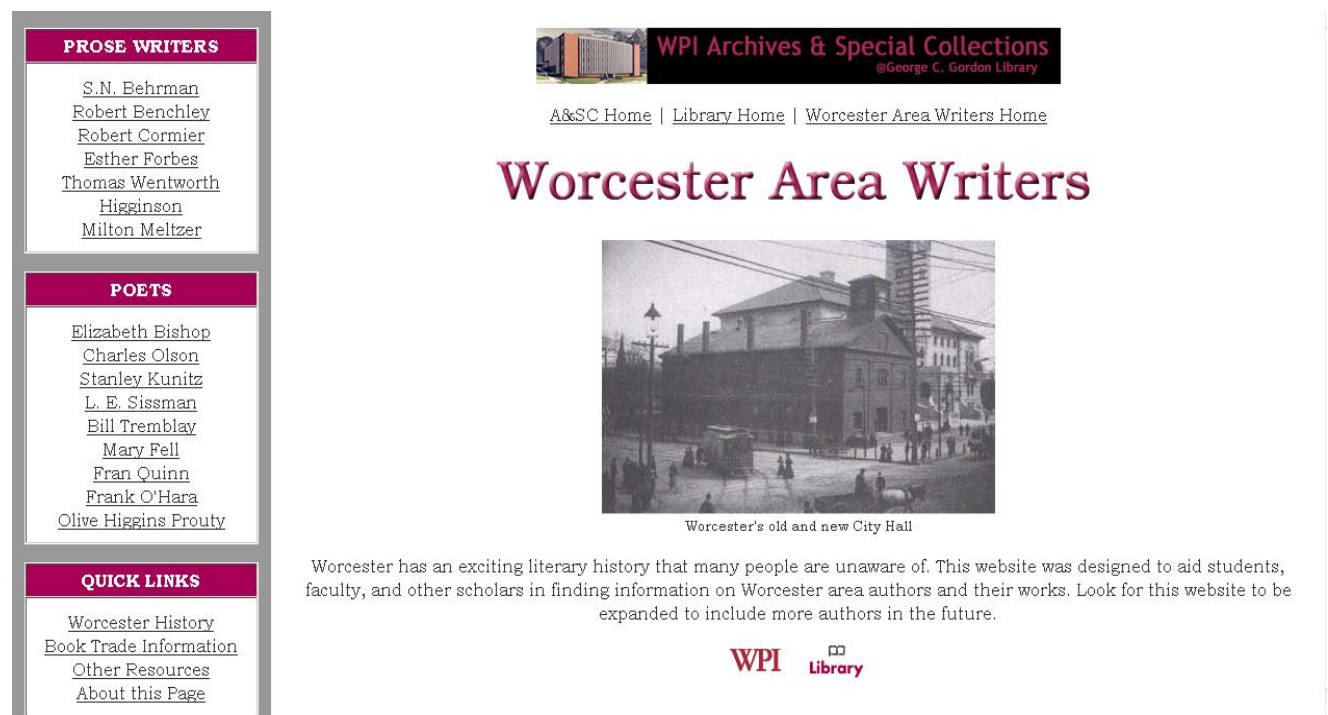


Figure 1: Previous website created by WPI students in 2003

2 Prep Phase: Early Design and First Renovation

There were several design improvements implemented into the first draft our renovated site (figure 2); alphabetical navigation by last name, navigation by genre, history of the project, a guest book, a quote of the week displayed on the home page, interactive media and a new overall interface. The aspects that we wanted to continue from the original site were the colors of white and maroon to reflect WPI's participation, the pictures, and the majority of the existing content. In addition to the new structure and additional features, there was some reorganization of the site structure. This is evident on the individual author pages where on the previous site the user would click on links for the author biography, works or photos which would bring them to a new page; on the revised site all of this information is condensed onto one page but still is navigated by the user clicking on a link- the difference being the link brings you to a certain point on the same page instead of the user leaving the author's main page. This significantly reduced the amount of files in the site's source, and made it easier for the user to see all the information at once instead of having to leave the page and return to view different information.

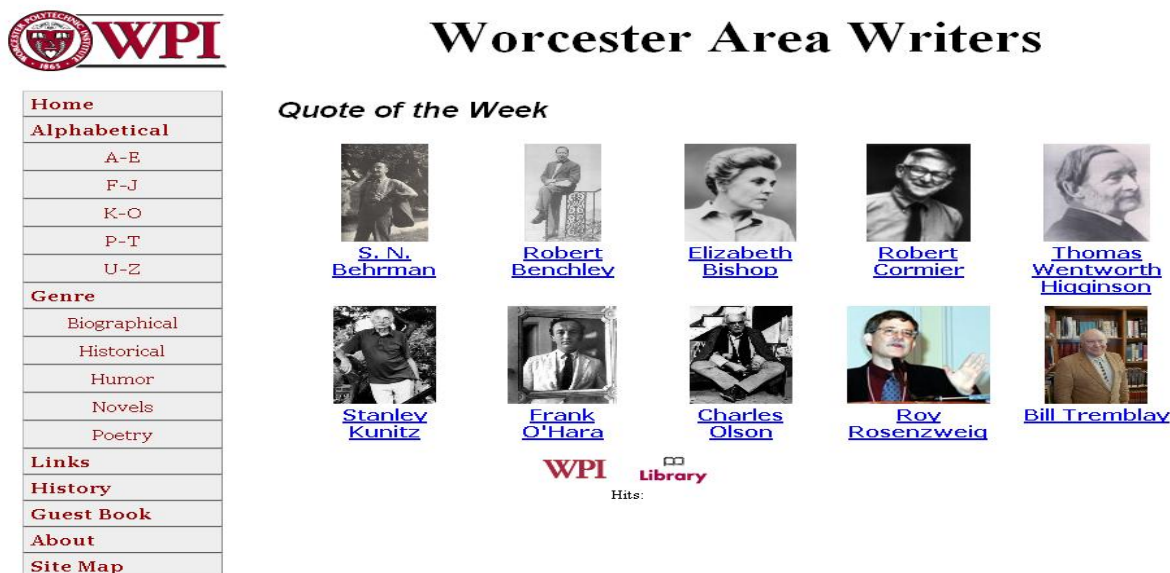


Figure 2: First site renovation created by WPI student Samuel Song in A-Term 2008

Once the basic structure was completed by Samuel Song, and I produced the second draft and redesigned the site so that there was more color and the site had a more professional interface (Figure 3). This was done by revising the color scheme, creating a new CSS, and adding in graphical banners; in addition, while redesigning the appearance of the site, I also implemented both new written content and student produced media.



Figure 3: Second site renovation created by WPI student Julia J. Berg in D-Term 2009

3.1 Building the Website

The coding implementation of the site development was done primarily by Samuel Song in A term of 2008. He used HTML and CSS (Cascading Style Sheets) to create the site's interface and navigation bar. Samuel also wrote a Perl script that cycled through and displayed various quotes for a Message of the Day section to be featured on the homepage. As the project progressed, this then evolved into Quote of the Week and then just a featured quotes slideshow

that would cycle automatically. In D term of 2009 I then added in interactive media to make the site more aesthetically pleasing and sophisticated, as well as embedding the student produced media and Google map with markers. The web development was done using Adobe Dreamweaver. The navigation bar was also re-coded by myself into a server-side include so that when adding or removing an author from the site, it would only have to be edited in the navigation file instead of having to edit approximately 50 files to reflect the changes in the left-hand bar.

3.2 Website Servers and Hosting Information

The testing server for the site is located at http://users.wpi.edu/~cityofwords/jjbergSite/public_html/newindex.html. Once the renovated site is approved by all group members and browser testing is completed then this site version will replace the existing website at its original URL. A copy of all the source code is currently available on the City of Words SharePoint, as well as through accessing the toaster account using WinSCP or any FTP program. The login information for the site is *username: cityofwords* and *password: bY.V2Bw7* at *ccc.wpi.edu* as the host name. This is a private server space account set up by the WPI CCC Helpdesk where all of the website source code is stored, as well as some of the mp3 files. It is hosted a server called “toaster” and is one of the most commonly accessed network drives on the WPI campus; each student is assigned an individual toaster account to store their related school files and these can be accessed from both on and off campus. The server space for our group was made so that I as a web developer could edit the files and store them in a secure area. The movies are hosted on a separate media server spaced set up by Erin DeSilva on behalf of the ATC. Once the site has

been tested then the edited files must be moved over to the live space by Rodney Obien of the WPI Gordan Library Archives.

3.3 Testing

In addition to having the project member's progress evaluations of the site, browser testing was done to ensure that the website both functioned and looked correct in four of the world's most popular internet browsers. It was important to gather feedback on the appearance and structure, as well as functionality as websites can greatly differ depending on how they are accessed by various users. The browsers tested were Internet Explorer versions 7 and 8, Mozilla Firefox versions 1-3, Google Chrome and Apple Safari. These browsers were selected based on a research study conducted by w3schools that ranked the percentage of users using which browser by the month for the last seven years¹. This browser testing should be performed before uploading the revised site.

3.4 Search Engine Optimization

To ensure that people researching Worcester area writers could find our project on the Internet, especially via sites like Google search, it was important to implement Search Engine Optimization (SEO) to our website. This is the process of adding relevant keywords to each page on a website, that way when a user searches these keywords into a search, our pages would be displayed high up on the results page, driving more traffic to our website. These keywords need to be embedded into the HTML files into the <meta> tags and the actual words were determined both by the former site's coding as well as online SEO tools such as Google Analytics which produces keywords based on a page's content. This was not done in either renovation of the site and is a necessary step before the website goes live.

¹ http://www.w3schools.com/browsers/browsers_stats.asp

4 Media

Media was incorporated into the web development as well as new content made for increasing the site's interactivity. I created layouts for my proposed banner images and featured quotes section using Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Illustrator. The banner was created using Adobe Flash and would be the top heading on every page on the site. The banner contained the project name, a rotating slideshow of authors' faces, and a montage of local landmarks in Worcester, MA. The banner was finalized after gathering group feedback and revising details such as font style and image dimensions. Once the banners concept and art was complete, the group then voted on which banner image to display on the website and it was implemented into the renovated site.

Another interactive component of the website was to have a virtual tour of important places in the Worcester area that influenced the writers featured on the site. I created a customized Google map and added trail markers of important places in the area. For each marker there is a short description of what the location is and its significance. This map is accessible through the left navigation and the Interactive Worcester Writers Tour link, as well as by visiting the direct URL at http://maps.google.com/maps/ms?ie=UTF8&hl=en&msa=0&msid=_102345343114423930524.0004664b3de4336aa62cb&t=h&z=14&mid=1238614938.

In addition other media produced and that needs to be edited by the makers, as well as added to the site once it is uploaded to the server space, is: Jarred Reymond's movie compilation of interviews and recorded works, Davis Nguyen's author interview movie in edited, MP3 recordings of works, photo galleries for each author on their individual page (some already are complete and others lack copyright permissions at the date of this report submission), and individualized Google map tours for authors.

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall I thought Samuel Song and I were successful in creating an improved website that looked more aesthetically pleasing as well improving the navigational features. Although there is a complete second renovation of the site, there is definitely more content that needs to be added. I hope that the site will continue to evolve by adding individualized Google map tours for each author, as well as embedding the video and recorded mp3s of author interviews onto the site. This will greatly enhance the site's interactivity and give viewers a more unique experience. The first-hand interviews and biographies are also great compliment to the site because it avoids any copyright issues from unreferenced work or borrowed photographs. Having a dedicated webmaster on the IQP group in the future will ensure that these edits are made promptly and tracked accordingly. It should also be enforced that other group members have the responsibility of turning in material on stricter deadlines, that way the site will continuously be evolving. One of the main issues was poor communication amongst group members and that it took some people weeks to submit updated work to be added to the site which caused major delays in the site launch.

AC Acknowledgements

The successful completion of this project would not have been possible without the contributions of the following individuals. I would like to take the time to thank them for their assistance and support:

- James Dempsey
- Erin DeSilva
- Rodney Obien
- Samuel Song
- Nicholas Gage (whom I interviewed and wrote a biography on)
- The WPI Humanities and Arts Department
- The WPI Archives at Gordon Library
- The WPI ATC
- The WPI CCC

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Nick Gage Timeline

- Nicholas Gage (born Nicholas Gatzoyiannis in the village of Lia in Epirus, Greece in 1939)
- 1949, Nicholas Gage first came to America in 1949 with three of his sisters aboard a ship to meet the father they had never known.
- 1949 Move into house on Greendale Ave (pg. 55)
- Fall 1949, Gage and his sister, Fotini, first attended class at the Greendale School where they were both placed in a classroom for mentally retarded and learning-disabled students because there were no public school instructors trained to teach English as a foreign language.
- 1950 Glykeria reunites with family in America
- 1952 Family moves to Lincoln Street home
- 1952 October 21st, sister Olga marries Dino
- 1953 Christos buys house at 369 Chandler Street (picture on pg.185)
- 1954 May 30th consecration of new Church of St. Spyridon (at Russell and Elm streets opposite Elm Park)
- 1955 sister Kanta and Evangelo marry
- 1956 June, Nick Gage graduates HS as class president
- 1958 Olga and Dino have Eleni (named for mother) their fourth child and the first granddaughter pg. 313
- 1963 he received the Hearst Award for the best college journalist from John F. Kennedy at the White House.
- 1964 Gage earned a master's degree from Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism and began a reporting career that took him to The Associated Press
- 1968 left for Athens pg 389
- 1970 to 1980 as an investigative reporter and a foreign correspondent. During those years he wrote three books on organized crime and two novels and received the Newspaper Guild's Page One Award and the Sigma Delta Chi prize for his reporting.
- In 1980 Gage left the Times to fulfill a lifelong ambition and write the story of his mother's life and death. The book, [Eleni](#),
- 1983 published by Random House, was a Book-of-the-Month Club main selection, was nominated as the best biography by the National Book Critics' Circle
- 1983 July 13 Buried his father in Hope Cemetery (14 months later, Eleni's body was buried with his) pg. 418-419
- 1984 awarded the Heinemann Prize for best book of 1984 by the Royal Society of Literature of Great Britain
- 1985 The motion picture Eleni, starring John Malkovich and Kate Nelligan, was released.

List of important locations in Nicholas Gage's life – specifically in Worcester, MA

1. Greendale School
2. Chandler Junior High
3. First House on Greendale Avenue
4. Second house on Lincoln Street
5. Third house at 369 Chandler Street
6. new Church of St. Spyridon at Russell and Elm Street
7. Spent hours at Greendale Theater
8. Hope Cemetery
9. Locations where Nicholas Gage worked (i.e. Worcester Telegram, etc)

Notes from Nicholas Gage Interview 10/15/08

- **Worcester was a huge influence on your life and your writing of A Place for Us, how do you feel about it now?**

Well I'm still here aren't I? Worcester is a great city for immigrants and it gave a lot to me. My only hope was that it had been more developed...

- **Pg.403 your father said his country was America, his home. Where do you call your home or do you have many? And Why?**

Well with travel being so much easier these days, people are able to have multiple homes. I definitely consider this one home and Greece my other. I still visit 3-4 times a year.

- **Are you still close with the families of Greek immigrants you helped come to America?**

Yes, I am with several of them. The original immigrants that my father and I helped come to America, we are still in touch. There is a fraternity? Social group of us and they were just over here last week. We organize events and put projects together to do back in Greece.

- **Is there still an annual *Liotes' glendi* in Worcester?**

No, there is no longer an annual *glendi*; you need 200-300 people to have a good one. But we do all meet, about 80-100 of us to gather. Many people have spread and moved away so it is harder to get a large group together.

- **Do you visit Hope Cemetery in Worcester?**

Yes, I go to church every Sunday on Russell Street, by your school, and I stop at the cemetery on the way home. I go there probably twice a month. My parents are there as well as many other family and friends. As you know, the past is important to a writer.

- **Did you regret that you and your father did not make it to your Grandfather in time to see him before his death?**

Yes, I do regret it, but I had wanted to go back, it was that I when I found out how sick he was it was too late. But maybe it was meant to be, in some way. He should have helped us and saved us from Lia.

- **Do you think your father ever forgave him? Or himself?**

[I don't remember your response for this one, my apologies]

- **Although you were 30 and had gone to grad school and were prepared as an investigative reporter to return to Greece for the second time, how were you emotionally? Were the distractions of girlfriends enough then to be reminded of your family history?**

I wasn't ready; I needed more experience before going to interview the many communists and guerrillas that I wanted information from. It wasn't just girlfriends and friends; I wasn't ready at that time...

- **Did you get a same sense of strength from closure after writing this book?**

What book? A Place for Us? I wrote it because I thought I owed it to my mother... there also wasn't a book about the Greek war like this one and people should know.

- **Did you ever keep a journal when you were growing up? The detail that you were able to record every moment with was astounding.**

No, I didn't keep a journal. I was too busy with writing for the newspaper, writing articles, working on various things trying to get published, that also writing in a journal seemed too much. The detail that I write with is from my investigative reporting training, I asked many people very detailed questions. I did 400 interviews in 4 countries. I wouldn't tell them who I was, what had happened to my mother. I just told them I was writing a book on the civil war. So the guerrillas agreed because they figured if I was interviewing them I was writing about their side of their story, and for the communists I hid the recorder right here in my sock. I just made sure my pant leg didn't show it.

- **Did you ever consider using your original Greek name (not the wrong one written in America) instead of Nicholas Gage on your work? How did your family feel about not having Gatzoyiannis on the byline?**

Well I still have my Greek name on my license and documents, just not on the book. I have relatives who came here with the phonetic spelling, but not me. They took my fathers first initial and added it to the last name, and misspelled it originally.

- **There were many moments that made your relationship with your father stronger, like your court appearance, meeting the President, your wedding, and your book Eleni- does he exist in your memories without any of the anger you felt towards him as a child?**

No, of course not, we grew very close the last 20 years. Moments like my accident when he spoke out for me, made us stronger. I realized that he loved me as much as my mother did.

- **Did you tell your family about your research during this time?**

I told my family I was learning about my mother's past, but not in detail like that I was interviewing communists and guerrillas. That would have worried them. I did tell Joan though... she was very supportive.

- **Since you ended up marrying Joan, who was not Greek, did you allow your children to marry out of their ethnic group too?**

Well my son didn't ask, they don't ask these days.

- **Although the ceremony was done as traditional as possible, with no spoken English, how was raising your family to include both cultures?**

I tried to raise my children with the best of both cultures. American with honesty, the will to succeed, and [I don't remember the third quality you listed]. And Greek with family, expressing their emotion and [I don't remember the third quality you listed]. They all speak Greek.

- **What was the reaction to your books back in Greece?**

The Left tried to ignore it for awhile. Whenever I did interviews I always said I was writing about the Greek civil war, I did not them about my family and what happened to my mother. When the book came out they were a little concerned because I told everything that happened, but it is the story of my family. Then it became the best selling book in Greece. It also did very well in London, Germany, and the US.

- **Did you keep in touch with your English teacher Miss Hurd?**

Yes, she just had surgery a few weeks ago and I went to see her. I do keep in touch with her. In fact I wrote an article about her and it was published in Parade magazine and then again in like 30 books. It was how my teacher changed my life; you can see why it was republished because people like to know how teachers make an impact on peoples lives. I still have it here the original. I will make you a photocopy.

- **Did you pass on the power of words to your children?**

My son is a screenwriter in LA. My daughter Eleni is a journalist for the New York Times and she is going back to Greece soon on assignment, and my other daughter studied and taught French and now does design.

Julia Josefina Berg - Worcester Writers Project – Nicholas Gage Biography

Nicholas Gage (born Nicholas Gatzoyiannis in the village of Lia in Epirus, Greece in 1939) is a Greek American author and investigative journalist. He uses the dramatic events of his life in both Greek and American cultures as the raw material for his books; he has written exposes and novels based on his award-winning investigations as a reporter, as well as memoirs about his family, both of which have garnered wide acclaim and prestige throughout the world.

Gage is most famous for his two autobiographical memoirs, the best selling Eleni and A Place for Us. Eleni describes the life of his family in Greece during the Second World War and Greek Civil War. In Eleni, Gage used his skills he learned as an investigative reporter for *The New York Times* to tell the story of how his mother arranged for her children to escape from their Communist-occupied village, how she was tortured and executed in retribution by guerrillas, and how he tracked down those responsible for her death thirty years later. The book is renowned internationally and has been translated into 32 languages, as well as a motion picture. A Place for Us relates the Gage family's experiences as immigrants in 1950s America in the city of Worcester, Massachusetts. When Nicholas Gage was nine years old, after his mother was executed during the Greek Civil War, he and his sisters fled Greece to live with their estranged father in the United States of America. It is a definitive story of the modern immigrant experience, relating the triumphs, heartbreaks, and misadventures of the children as they try to assimilate to their new country and stern but well-meaning father. It is a memoir of Gage's personal and family life, and describes in detail pivotal moments that helped shaped him to be the man he is today.

Nicholas Gage first came to America in 1949 with three of his sisters aboard a ship to meet the father they had never known. They left behind their mother who had been executed by Guerrillas, as well as their sister Glykeria who had been captured and nobody knew where she was. At the time Gage was a nine-year-old boy who knew no English, except for the few words he had been taught by a friendly passenger on the boat from Greece. He and his sisters arrived in New York harbor where he scanned the crowd “trying to recognize the father [he] had never seen”. It was the first time that Gage and his father, Christos, had met and it marked the start of their complex relationship of discovering each others identity and learning their love for one another through trying times. After going through customs and exchanging somewhat awkward hellos, the family drove to Worcester, MA where the Gatzoyiannis children would grow up.

Throughout his adolescence, Gage was often found at the Greendale Theater spending his precious spare change to be lost in the dramas on the screen. Gage also enjoyed boxing with the neighborhood boys, and attending Church and Greek School with the majority of the local Greek community. He also worked part-time at various Worcester locations like the *Worcester Gazette*. He and his father helped hundreds of Greek immigrants come to America their whole lives, and Nick helped by writing to local politicians for their assistance.

In 1949, Gage and his sister, Fotini, first attended class at the Greendale School where they were both placed in a classroom for mentally retarded and learning-disabled students because there were no public school instructors trained to teach English as a foreign language. His other sisters, Olga and Kanta, attended the Day School for Immigrants on Lamartine Street, because according to their father it was more important for a man to be educated to support his family, and because you had to be thirteen years old to enroll. Gage was an avid student who

quickly learned the language of his new country, and his literary career was largely shaped by the encouragement of a junior high school teacher, Miss Elizabeth Hurd at Chandler Junior High.

It was at Chandler Junior High that Gage joined the school newspaper, where Miss Hurd was the teacher-adviser, and taught him how to write articles for the *Chandler Echo*. He first found talent in poetry, and was so gratified by Miss Hurd's encouragement that he asked the assistant principal to transfer into her English class in addition to the newspaper club. In that class she picked out Greek literature and inspired Gage to pursue a career in journalism rather than engineering. In eighth grade she asked Nick to write about what happened to him in Greece during the war- a more than emotionally challenging assignment – and marked a lot of closure for Gage in reflecting on the tragedy surrounding his mother and her sacrifices for her family. After writing it he hoped to never read the essay again, but unfortunately for him, not only did she share it with the class but also submitted it a competition by the Freedom Foundation at Valley Forge and Gage's winning essay was published in the Evening Gazette. At this point Gage's father was extremely proud of his son and Gage made a name for himself in the Greek community at a young age. He became the editor of the junior high and high school papers, and the award clinched his decision to become a journalist. He worked for the *Worcester Gazette* the summer before college, and he went to Boston University with a promise to return there the next year.

Gage won a scholarship to Boston University's School of Public Communications. During his first week at B.U he was appointed to be the paper's drama critic, and enjoyed attending campus theatrical productions and interviewing the occasional theatre celebrity. In addition to working for *B.U News*, he took up a part-time job at a local newspaper called the *Hellenic Chronicle* in downtown Boston. This was his first chance to practice real journalism

and write about Greece. His second year at B.U he was named city editor of the newspaper and the post paid half his tuition. With the money, he was able to go home on weekends to visit his family more often. It was after writing a controversial piece for the *B.U News* that lost him his job there, that the *New York Times* contacted him and suggested he go into journalism his junior year. That year in 1963, he received the Hearst Award for the best college journalist and was presented the award by John F. Kennedy at the White House.

The June after his college graduation ceremony, Gage left for his first return to Greece. On that trip he interviewed relatives and fellow villagers to try and gather more information on what had happened to his mother and would later return to continue his personal investigation on his family's history and search for self-identity.

In 1964 Gage earned a master's degree from Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism and began a reporting career that took him to The Associated Press. From 1970 to 1980, Gage worked for many newspapers including *The Boston Herald Traveler*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The New York Times*, as an investigative reporter and a foreign correspondent. During those years he wrote two novels, in addition to three books on organized crime. He also received the Sigma Delta Chi prize and the Newspaper Guild's Page One Award for his outstanding reporting.

In 1980 Gage left *The New York Times* to fulfill a lifelong ambition to write the story of his mother's life and death. The book, Eleni, published by Random House in 1983, was a Book-of-the-Month Club main selection, was nominated as the best biography by the National Book Critics' Circle, and was awarded the Heinemann Prize for best book of 1984 by the Royal

Society of Literature of Great Britain. In 1985 the motion picture *Eleni*, starring John Malkovich and Kate Nelligan was released.

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Gage, N. (1989). *A place for us*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Interview with N. Gage by Julia Berg 10/15/08) at his home in North Grafton, MA.



At the harborside in Piraeus, before boarding ship for America on March 3, 1949



George Cocaine



Some words of advice before Nick set out on his honeymoon.



Father and son at Nick's graduation from Columbia in 1964.



Nick receiving the Hearst prize from President Kennedy in 1963



Christos and his new family on the porch of the three-decker on Greendale Avenue